

The TIMEKEEPER

Life Isn't
Counted by Years...
but by *Moments*
in Time.



FRANK ZAFFINO
1842 - 1910
Italy to America

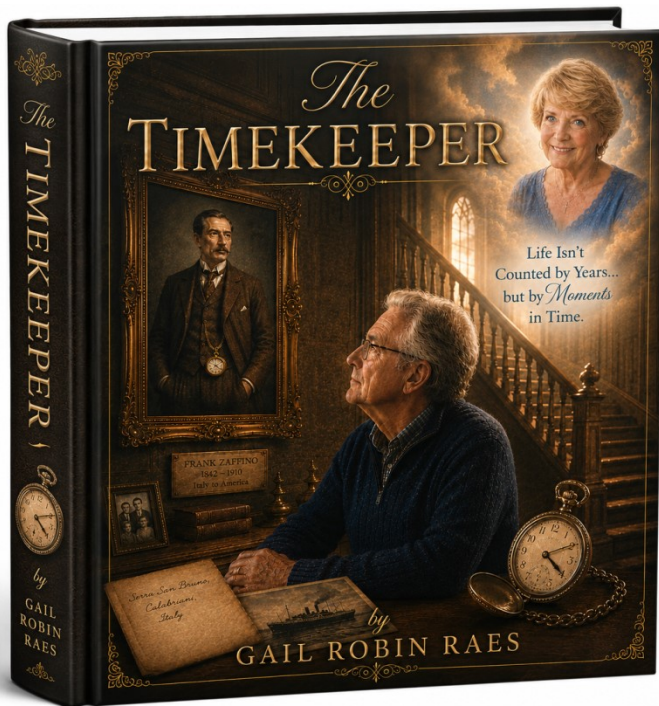


by
GAIL ROBIN RAES

The Timekeeper

Life Isn't Counted by Years... but by Moments in Time.

Written by Gail Robin Raes



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The Timekeeper

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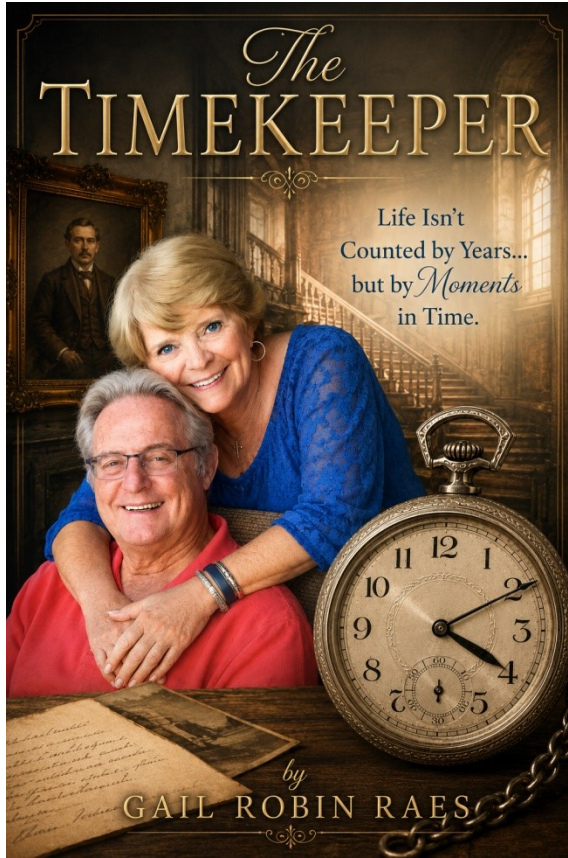
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Dedication

Dedicated to Jim Zaffino



Thank you for trusting me with your remarkable dream.

May your story remind every reader that time is life's greatest gift, and that the moments we choose to live become the memories we leave behind.

Happy Birthday, Jim

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Introduction

Some stories begin with a dream.

Others begin with three simple words.

"Tell me more."

I first met Jim and his late wife, Carole, at a happy hour in 2022. Before long, Bruno and I were invited to celebrate Jim's 80th birthday, and over the years our friendship continued to grow.

When I was writing *Dream On*, Jim shared one of the most memorable dreams in the book. In his dreams, Carole was still alive. They spent ordinary moments together—talking, laughing, and simply enjoying each other's company. Jim once told me he never wanted those dreams to end because, for a little while each night, he was once again with the love of his life.

Later, while writing *Will You Marry Me?*, I invited friends and family to share their engagement stories. Jim was the very first person to respond. He has always been generous about sharing the important moments of his life, and I have always been grateful for that.

Then one afternoon, my phone rang.

It was Jim.

He told me he'd had the strangest dream.

The dream had awakened him at two o'clock in the morning, and for days he couldn't stop thinking about it. It involved an antique Hamilton pocket watch that had belonged to his great-grandfather.

I listened quietly.

Then I replied with three simple words.

"Tell me more."

A few days later, Jim brought the watch to my home. We sat together for hours as he shared every detail of his dream, along with the notes he had written afterward so he wouldn't forget anything. The more he talked, the more fascinated I became—not only by the mystery of the dream, but by the questions it refused to let go.

At the time, I was putting the finishing touches on *Dream On and On*, the sequel to *Dream On*. I truly believed I had written the final chapter.

But there was just enough room for one more.

I asked Jim if I could share his story.

He graciously said yes.

As I began writing, something unexpected happened.

What I thought would become one final chapter slowly grew into something much larger. The dream, the watch, our conversations, and the questions it raised all seemed to take on a life of their own.

Eventually, I realized this wasn't simply another chapter.

It was its own story.

The title came naturally.

The Timekeeper.

While researching Jim's antique Hamilton pocket watch, I discovered something that made the title even more meaningful. In the early 1900s, Hamilton used the slogan "**The Timekeeper**" in its advertising. Renowned for their remarkable accuracy, Hamilton watches became the trusted timepieces of America's railroads, where precise timekeeping was essential for safety.

Somehow, it felt as though the title had been waiting all along—not only for the watch, but for the story it would one day inspire.

What began as one man's unforgettable dream became a story about something we all share.

Time.

Not the kind measured by clocks or calendars.

The kind measured by conversations we almost didn't have...

Trips we keep postponing...

People we mean to call...

Dreams we keep saving for "someday."

I hope you'll enjoy Jim's story as much as I enjoyed writing it.

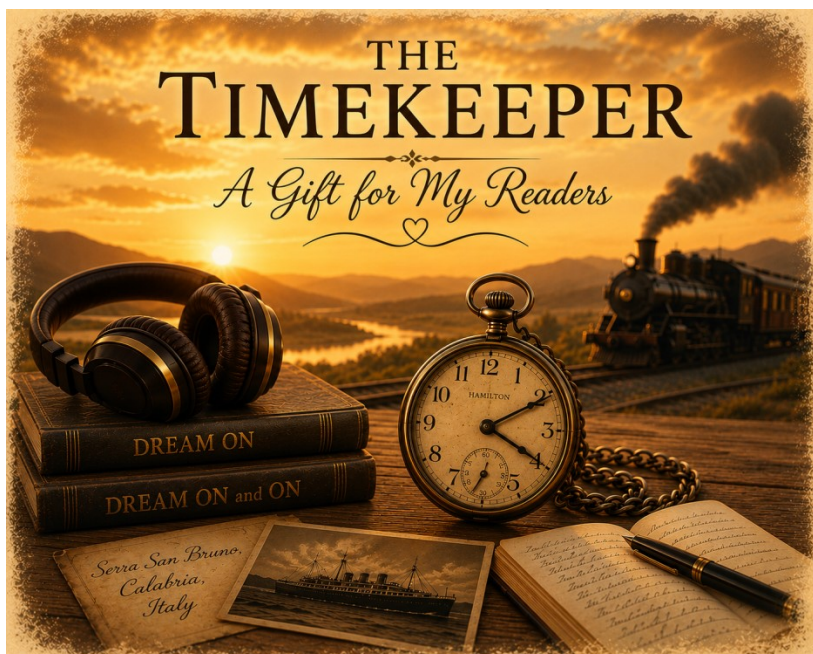
More than anything, I hope it reminds you that some of life's most meaningful stories begin with an ordinary conversation... and three little words.

"Tell me more."

Thank you for reading.

— **Gail Robin Raes**

A Gift for My Readers



Thank you for reading The Timekeeper.

Stories have always been meant to be shared—not only through the written word, but also through the spoken voice. As my gift to you, I've included a complimentary audiobook edition so you can experience Jim's remarkable journey in another way.

Whether you're relaxing at home, taking a quiet walk, or simply enjoying a peaceful moment, I hope you'll find yourself immersed in the story once again.

To listen to your complimentary audiobook, visit:

www.GailRaes.com/timekeeper

If Jim's story has reminded you to make that phone call, take that trip, begin that project, or simply treasure today a little more, then his dream has continued its journey—and that is the greatest gift any author could hope for.

Thank you for reading, for listening, and for allowing Jim and me to share this remarkable story with you.

With gratitude,

Gail Robin Raes

Chapter 1

The Timekeeper

Life Isn't Counted by Years... but by Moments in Time.

Some dreamers visit once.

Others return.

There are a handful of people whose dreams have stayed with me long after they left my office.

Jim was one of them.

If you've read my first *Dream On* book, you may remember Jim—the widower in his eighties whose late wife, Carole, continued visiting him in his dreams after her passing. Night after night they shared ordinary moments together, and when he woke, the comfort remained.

Near the end of our first conversation, Jim quietly confessed something that has stayed with me ever since.

"I don't want the dreams to stop."

It wasn't because he wanted to escape reality.

It was because, for a few precious moments each night, love felt untouched by loss.

Some dreams don't ask to be interpreted.

They simply ask for permission to comfort us.

Jim's was one of those dreams.

More than a year had passed since I'd last seen him.

So when he walked through my office door again, I smiled before either of us said a word.

Seeing Jim again felt a little like catching up with an old friend.

Not because we were friends.

Because some conversations linger.

And Jim's had.

I wondered if he was still dreaming of Carole.

Instead, he couldn't suppress a smile and said something I wasn't expecting.

"I brought something with me."

He carefully placed a glass dome on my desk.

Beneath it rested an antique pocket watch.

Even before he lifted the glass, I could tell it had been treasured.

"I inherited it from my great-grandfather," he said.

He handed it to me carefully.

The watch felt surprisingly heavy in my hand.

Its silver case had softened with age, polished smooth by generations before finally finding its way to Jim. More than a century old, it had quietly measured the passing of time long before either of us had been born.

It wasn't simply an old watch.

It was a family story you could hold in your hand.

Jim watched me study it for a moment.

Then smiled at the memory. "You know what's funny?"

"What?"

"I almost never look at it."

He paused.

"But a few days ago..."

...for some reason...

...I did."

He leaned back in his chair. "And that night..."

His smile faded into something more thoughtful.

"I had the strangest dream."

*Time is life's greatest gift.
The way we choose to live it
becomes our story.*



Chapter 2

4:10

Jim sat quietly for a moment, as though deciding where to begin.

"It started with the house," he said.

"What kind of house?"

"A big one. Turn-of-the-century. The kind of house people built a hundred years ago. Hardwood floors. A wide front hallway. And this beautiful staircase that rose to a landing before splitting left and right."

As he spoke, I could almost see it.

"It wasn't a house I'd ever lived in," he continued. "At least I don't think so. But in the dream it felt familiar."

His eyes brightened, "You know how dreams do that."

I nodded. "They never bother explaining why we already know where we are."

"Exactly."

He leaned forward. "At the foot of the staircase hung this enormous oil painting of my great-grandfather, who had emigrated from Italy to America."

"The same great-grandfather who owned the watch?"

"Yes."

Jim picked up the watch from my desk and turned it gently in his hands.

"Years ago I visited Serra San Bruno, a small town in the Calabrian region of Italy where my great-grandfather had lived before coming to America. Standing there, I couldn't help but think about the journey that eventually brought our family here."

A hint of amusement crossed his face.

"At the time, the mayor was Bruno Zaffino. We shared the same last name, and his first name came from the town itself."

He looked at me with a twinkle in his eye, "It made the whole visit unforgettable."

"What did your great-grandfather look like in the portrait?"

Jim didn't answer immediately.

"I remember his brown suit," he said. "And his vest."

He pointed to the watch resting on my desk. "The watch was hanging from a chain across the front of his vest, just the way men wore them back then."

He grew quiet again. "I couldn't stop looking at it."

"The painting?"

"No... the watch."

He looked down at the antique pocket watch between us. "It looked exactly like this one."

I waited.

"In the dream, I kept walking through the house. I'd pass the painting, go about whatever I was doing, and later I'd walk past it again."

He shrugged. "Nothing unusual."

"Until..."

He grew thoughtful, "Until I happened to notice the watch."

He paused, searching his memory. "The hands were pointing to four-ten."

He looked at me as though making sure I understood.

"I remember that part clearly."

"Four-ten."

He nodded. "I didn't think much about it the first time."

He gave a small shrug. "It was just... a watch."

His expression changed. "But the next time I walked past the painting..."

He stopped speaking. "The time had changed."

I found myself leaning forward. "What do you mean?"

"I mean..."

The memory made him smile, "It wasn't four-ten anymore."

"What time was it?"

"I honestly don't remember. Maybe five-twenty. Maybe five-thirty."

He shook his head. "The exact time isn't what stayed with me."

"What did?"

"The fact that it had changed."

He looked back at the watch. "It was only an oil painting."

The room grew very quiet.

"I walked past it again." His voice dropped almost to a whisper.

"The time had changed again."

He slowly shook his head. "I must have walked past that portrait a dozen times."

"And every single time... the watch showed a different time."

Neither of us spoke for several moments.

Finally, I asked the question I knew he'd been asking himself ever since he woke.

"What did you think?"

Jim smiled. "I thought..."

He laughed softly at the memory. "...that's impossible."

He looked directly at me. "It's only a painting."

His eyes drifted back to the watch resting on my desk.

"So why..." He paused. "...was it still keeping time?"

Chapter 3

The Questions Time Leaves Behind

Jim looked down at the watch resting between us.

"I've been thinking about this dream ever since I woke up."

"I can see that."

"I keep asking myself the same questions."

"Which ones?"

He didn't hesitate.

"How?"

I raised an eyebrow.

"How?"

"How did the time change?"

He picked up the watch and slowly turned it over in his hands.

"It was only an oil painting. There weren't any moving parts. No clock. No mechanism. Nothing that could have changed the hands."

He looked up at me.

"So how did it happen?"

I didn't answer.

Instead, I let the question remain exactly where it belonged.

With Jim.

He continued thinking out loud. "Was it my great-grandfather?"

"Was it something supernatural?"

"Was someone trying to tell me something?"

He leaned back in his chair. "I've thought about this dream so many times over the last week. I even caught myself thinking maybe someday I'd write a book about it."

"You have?"

He nodded. "It feels bigger than a single dream."

"It could be," I said.

His eyes brightened. "You really think so?"

"I do."

I could hear the excitement in his voice. "But I don't think that's the story your dream came to tell."

He looked surprised. "No?"

"I think you've been trying to explain the watch."

"And?"

"I think the dream is trying to explain something to you."

Silence settled over the room.

Jim slowly placed the watch back on the desk. "I hadn't thought about it that way."

I nodded, "I know."

He looked at me thoughtfully. "I keep wondering who changed the time."

"And why," I said.

"Yes."

He chuckled, "I've been driving you crazy, haven't I?"

I couldn't help smiling, "Not at all."

"I've been thinking about ghosts."

"And spirits."

"And maybe my great-grandfather trying to communicate."

He looked at me expectantly. "What do you think?"

I didn't answer immediately.

Instead, I asked him a question. "Jim..."

"Yes?"

"When was the last time you looked at that watch before the day of the dream?"

He thought for a long moment.

"I honestly don't know."

"Would you say it had been a month?" I asked.

He considered it.

"Maybe."

"Longer? A year?"

He glanced down at the watch.

"Possibly."

"So..." I said gently, "Why do you suppose you noticed it that day?"

He looked down at the watch again. "I've wondered that too."

"I think that's a more interesting question than how the hands changed."

He frowned slightly. "You do?"

"I do."

Another silence.

Then Jim quietly said something that neither of us had noticed before.

"When I look at this watch..."

He picked it up again. "...it takes me back in time."

I studied his expression. "I remember you saying that."

"It really does."

He ran his thumb lightly across the smooth silver case. "I don't know why."

"I think you do."

He looked puzzled again. "I do?"

"I think this watch already meant something to you before you ever dreamed about it."

Jim was quiet for a moment. "It wasn't just measuring minutes?"

I shook my head, "No. It was measuring memories."

Jim looked at the watch for a very long time.

"I never thought of it that way."

I nodded. "I don't think your subconscious chose this watch by accident."

He slowly placed it back beneath the glass dome.

Almost as though returning it to its place.

Then he looked at me. "So... If it wasn't about the watch, what was it about?"

I found myself smiling, "I think that's where your dream is just beginning."

Chapter 4

The Hands Never Stopped Moving

Jim sat quietly.

Neither of us seemed in a hurry to speak.

The old watch rested beneath its glass dome between us.

For a long time, neither of us looked at it.

Finally, I broke the silence.

"Jim..."

"Yes?"

"May I ask you something completely unrelated?"

He exhaled slowly, "I suppose."

"You've mentioned several times that you almost never look at this watch."

"I don't."

"But that day..."

"I did."

"What made you stop?"

He thought about it, "I honestly don't know."

"You weren't looking to see what time it was."

"No."

"You have clocks for that."

He seemed amused by the thought, "Several."

"So why that watch?"

He shook his head, "I've asked myself that."

"I think your subconscious already knew."

He looked puzzled. "Knew what?"

"That this watch meant something far beyond telling time."

He listened quietly.

"When you first handed it to me today, you didn't tell me how valuable it was."

"No."

"You didn't tell me how rare it was or what it was worth."

His face relaxed, "I guess I didn't."

"You told me it belonged to your great-grandfather."

His smile softened. "Yes."

"And then you said something else."

He looked at me curiously. "What?"

"When I look at it..."

I paused.

"...it takes me back in time."

His eyes widened just slightly, "I did say that."

"You did."

Silence settled comfortably between us.

"I think your mind had already chosen the symbol before you ever fell asleep."

Jim looked back toward the watch.

"So the dream wasn't really about the watch?"

"I think it was," I replied. "But perhaps not in the way you've been thinking."

He waited.

"The watch already represented time. It also represented family... memory... and the generations who came before you."

He rested both hands in his lap.

"I hadn't thought of that."

"I don't think most people would." I continued, "They would simply see an old watch."

Jim laughed softly. "I almost did."

"Until that day," I finished.

He looked thoughtful. "So why did the time keep changing?"

Instead of answering, I asked another question, "In your dream..."

Jim looked at me, "Yes?"

"Did the watch ever stop?"

He frowned, "No. It just kept changing."

"Every single time?"

He nodded, "Yes. Every time I walked past the painting, the hands had moved. But I hadn't changed them."

"No," I said quietly. "Nobody had."

He searched for the right words.

"It was simply... keeping time."

Jim sat quietly for a long moment.

Then he looked at me. "Who was utilizing the time that watch was measuring?"

I understood exactly what he meant, "What an interesting question."

He waited.

"Perhaps no one was utilizing the time, Jim."

He looked puzzled.

I continued gently. "Maybe that's exactly what the dream wanted you to notice."

His eyes drifted back to the watch beneath the glass dome.

"It was faithfully keeping time..."

"...whether anyone was paying attention to it or not."

"Yes."

The room fell silent.

Then, almost as though he were hearing himself for the first time, Jim whispered, "It never stopped. It just kept moving."

"Yes."

His eyes drifted toward the window. "I've been asking who changed the time."

"You have."

He smiled thoughtfully. "But maybe no one did."

I returned his smile. "Perhaps the watch was simply doing what watches have always done."

He looked at me. "Keeping time."

"Yes."

The room grew quiet again.

Sometimes the simplest truths arrive with the greatest gentleness.

Jim finally broke the silence. "So if the watch wasn't changing... what was?"

I looked at him for a long moment before answering.

"I think..." I chose my words carefully, "the person who noticed it."

Chapter 5

Time Was Still Being Given

Jim looked at the watch beneath its glass dome.

Neither of us spoke.

Sometimes silence gives people room to hear their own thoughts.

Finally, Jim grew thoughtful. "I've spent days wondering how that watch kept changing."

"I know."

"And now I'm beginning to wonder if I've been asking the wrong question."

I nodded. "I think you have."

He laughed at himself, "You've known that all along."

"I've suspected it."

He leaned back in his chair. "So... If the dream wasn't asking me how the watch changed... What was it asking?"

I looked toward the watch. "I don't think the dream was focused on the watch."

"No?"

"I think it was focused on time."

He didn't interrupt.

"The watch simply became the symbol."

Jim thought about that. "It wasn't really the watch that fascinated me. It was the passing of time."

"Yes."

He looked down at his hands. "I suppose watches do only one thing."

I agreed, "They do."

"They keep moving."

"Whether we notice them or not," I added.

He looked up. "I never thought about that."

I assured him, "Most of us don't."

The room became quiet again.

Then I asked him a question. "Jim..."

"When you inherited this watch..."

"What did you inherit?"

He looked surprised. "The watch."

"Only the watch?"

He replied, "No."

"What else?"

"My great-grandfather's memories."

I nodded. "What else?"

"My family's history."

"What else?"

He thought for a long time.

Finally he said softly, "The time he was given."

Neither of us spoke.

He was beginning to understand.

"The generations before you," I said quietly, "each received a measure of time."

He nodded. "They couldn't keep it."

"No."

"They couldn't save it."

"No."

"They could only spend it."

Jim looked at the watch again. "And then..."

"It became your turn."

His eyes remained fixed on the glass dome. "My turn."

I nodded, "Yes."

Another long silence.

Then Jim surprised both of us. "I've been thinking a lot about things I keep putting off."

I waited.

"There are places I'd still like to go."

"People I should probably call."

A mischievous glint crossed his face, "I keep saying there's always next week."

He stopped.

Then he quietly corrected himself. "I guess there isn't always next week."

I didn't answer.

He didn't need me to.

He was answering his own question now.

"I've been looking at my life as though time belonged to me."

His voice became almost a whisper. "But it never did."

He looked toward the watch one last time. "It was only entrusted to me."

I felt goosebumps.

Not because I had said those words.

Because Jim had.

Sometimes the dreamer reaches the meaning before the interpreter ever needs to.

Those are my favorite conversations.

Jim questioned, "So..."

"My great-grandfather's watch wasn't reminding me of the time he had."

"No."

"It was reminding me of the time I still have."

I nodded in agreement, "Yes."

He sat quietly for another moment.

Then he said something so simple... and so profound... that I've never forgotten it.

"I guess..."

He looked down at the old watch one last time.

"...time was still being given."

Chapter 6

Someday

Jim remained quiet.

He wasn't studying the watch anymore.

He was studying his own life.

After several minutes, he looked up. "You know what surprises me?"

"What?"

"I came here wanting to understand my dream."

"And?"

"I think I'm beginning to understand myself."

I studied his expression, "Dreams have a way of doing that."

His grin widened, "I've spent days trying to figure out who changed the watch."

"And now?"

"I don't think that's important anymore."

"No?"

He shook his head. "The watch wasn't asking me to solve a mystery."

"No."

"It was asking me to notice something."

I nodded, "What did you notice?"

He looked out the window. "That time never stopped."

"It never waited for me."

"It just kept moving."

I nodded, "Yes."

He gave a knowing smile. "I guess that's true whether we're paying attention or not."

"It is."

Another quiet moment passed.

Then Jim surprised me. "I've been saying 'someday' a lot lately."

I didn't answer.

"There are restaurants I've wanted to try."

He looked away, smiling, "I keep driving past them."

"There are friends I keep meaning to call; I always think I'll do it next week."

His smile faded. "And there are places I've wanted to visit."

He looked down. "I just never seem to get around to them."

The room grew still.

Finally he looked back at me. "I think I've been waiting."

"What for?"

"I don't know." He shook his head in amazement, "The perfect time?"

I smiled. "Have you found it yet?"

He shook his head. "No."

"What if there isn't one?"

He considered that. "I've always assumed there would be."

"So did I," I admitted.

He looked surprised at my answer, "You?"

"I think all of us have a little list called *Someday*."

He couldn't help smiling, "I like that."

"Books we'll read."

He nodded. "People we'll visit."

Another nod.

"Trips we'll take."

"Projects we'll start."

We both smiled.

Then I said quietly, "The problem with *Someday*..."

He waited. "...is that it never appears on a calendar."

A look of recognition crossed Jim's face, "I've never heard it put that way. But it's true."

"It is."

He became thoughtful again. "I think I've been living as though I have an unlimited supply of tomorrows."

Neither of us spoke.

Then he quietly added, "But every tomorrow eventually becomes today."

I smiled. "I couldn't have said it better."

He leaned back and took a deep breath. "You know..."

"What?"

"I don't think my great-grandfather's watch was measuring hours."

"No?"

"I think my dream was measuring opportunities."

I felt myself smile. "What makes you say that?"

"Because every time I walked past the painting..."

He paused. "...there was a little less time."

I let those words settle between us.

"I never felt frightened in the dream."

"No."

"I just felt..." He searched for the right word. "...aware."

I nodded. "I think that's exactly what the dream wanted."

He looked at me curiously. "Not fear?"

"No."

"What then?"

"Gratitude."

He tilted his head. "For what?"

I smiled. "For the time that's still yours."

Jim didn't speak for a long while.

Then he looked at the watch beneath its glass dome.

Not with sadness.

Not with regret.

But with appreciation.

"I think..."

"...it's time I stopped waiting for someday."

Chapter 7

The Gift of Today

Jim carefully lifted the glass dome one last time.

He picked up his great-grandfather's watch and rested it gently in the palm of his hand.

For several moments, he simply looked at it.

Not to see what time it was.

Just to appreciate what it represented.

Finally, he slipped the watch into his pocket. "I think I understand now."

I smiled. "What do you understand?"

He was quiet before answering. "My dream wasn't about my great-grandfather."

"No."

"It wasn't even about the watch. It was about what every generation receives."

He looked down at his hands. "A measure of time."

I nodded. "And every generation believes they'll have a little more."

He chuckled. "I know I did."

Neither of us spoke.

Then Jim smiled. "You know what I think is funny?"

"What?"

"I almost didn't come see you."

I blinked, "Really?"

"I kept thinking I'd make an appointment next week."

We both laughed.

"I guess my dream wasn't about next week."

"No."

"It was about today."

"Yes."

He stood and slipped on his jacket. Then he stopped. "You've given me a lot to think about."

I shook my head. "I don't think I did."

He looked puzzled. "No?"

"I think your dream did."

A warmth came to his eyes, "I suppose you're right."

He reached for the doorknob.

Then he turned back toward me. "I've been thinking about calling my daughter more often."

I agreed, "I think she'd like that."

"And there are a couple of old friends I've been meaning to have lunch with."

"That sounds like a wonderful idea."

He nodded. "I've also been talking about taking a little trip."

He grinned, "For so long that I almost believe I've already been."

I looked at him, "Maybe it's time."

"I think it is."

He reached into his pocket and touched the watch again. "You know..."

"What?"

"I used to think this watch connected me to my past."

"And now?"

He brightened, "I think it also reminds me that I still have a future."

Those words settled quietly between us.

Not a future measured in years.

A future measured in moments.

Jim thanked me, shook my hand, and walked toward the door.

Just before he left, he turned back one final time, "I guess I have one more question."

"I thought you might."

He looked down at the watch resting in his hand, "So... what does it all mean?"

I took a moment before answering, "It means your dream was never asking what time it was."

He looked up, "What was it asking?"

I met his eyes, "What you were going to do with the time you have."

Jim stood there for a long moment.

Then he reached into his pocket and wrapped his fingers around his great-grandfather's watch.

He was quiet for a moment. "I think..."

He looked down at the watch one last time, "...I'm going to stop waiting for someday."

A feeling of quiet satisfaction settled over me, "I think that's exactly what your dream was hoping you'd say."

He nodded. "Goodbye."

"Goodbye, Jim."

The office grew quiet again.

I found myself thinking about the generations who had carried that watch before him.

Each had been given time.

Each had spent it differently.

Each had eventually passed it on.

Perhaps that was the true inheritance.

Not the watch.

Not the silver case.

Not even the memories.

But the quiet reminder that every morning we wake, life places another twenty-four hours into our hands.

None of us knows how many mornings remain.

But every one of us gets to decide what we'll do with today.

As I gathered my notes before the next appointment, I found myself smiling.

Jim had come looking for the meaning of a dream.

Instead...

he had rediscovered the value of an ordinary Tuesday.

Maybe that's why his dream has stayed with me.

Because every so often, I catch myself thinking about an old pocket watch.

And when I do...

I don't ask what time it is.

I ask myself a different question.

What will I do with the time I've been given today?

Chapter 8

A Different Tomorrow

It was several months before I heard from Jim again.

His name appeared on my caller ID one afternoon.

When I answered, I immediately recognized his voice.

"You'll never guess what I've been doing."

I smiled. "I have a feeling you're going to tell me."

He chuckled. "I've been pretty busy."

There was something different in his voice.

A quiet excitement I hadn't heard before.

It wasn't the sound of someone who had solved a mystery.

It was the sound of someone who had begun living differently.

"I called my daughter. She was thrilled."

"I've had lunch with two old friends."

"They couldn't believe I finally stopped talking about getting together and actually made the plans."

There was a smile in his voice, "And remember that little trip I kept saying I'd take someday?"

"I remember."

"I took it."

"How was it?"

There was a brief pause.

"I should have gone years ago."

"I think a lot of people say that after finally taking a trip they've postponed."

"I know."

He grew quiet for a moment. "You know what surprised me the most?"

"What?"

"I wasn't trying to outrun time anymore."

I let the sentence settle.

"I was simply enjoying it."

There was a contentment in his voice that hadn't been there before.

Not because everything in his life had changed.

Because he had.

"The watch is still in the display cabinet."

"I thought it would be."

"But now..."

He paused.

"I never look at it the same way again."

"What do you see now?" I asked.

"A reminder to live today."

For a moment, neither of us spoke.

Then Jim said something I'll never forget.

"You know..."

"What?"

"I spent so much time wondering how many years I had left..."

He paused.

"...I almost forgot to enjoy the day I was already living."

I closed my eyes for a moment.

Sometimes dreamers say exactly what the interpreter could never improve upon.

"I'm glad you remembered."

"So am I."

We said goodbye.

After I hung up, I found myself thinking about Jim's dream one last time.

Not about the changing hands on the painted watch.

Not about the mystery.

Not even about the interpretation.

I thought about one ordinary decision.

Jim had chosen to stop waiting.

Perhaps that is the greatest gift a dream can give us.

Not answers.

Action.

Dreams rarely change the world overnight.

But sometimes...

they quietly change one person's today.

And that's where every new tomorrow begins.

Chapter 9

The Time We Think We Have

Dream Interpreter's Reflection

Some dreams arrive wrapped in mystery.

Others arrive wrapped in wisdom.

Jim came to see me believing his dream was about an old pocket watch whose hands mysteriously kept changing in a painting.

Like many dreamers, he wanted to understand *how* something impossible could happen.

But dreams don't always ask us to explain the impossible.

Sometimes they ask us to notice the obvious.

Time keeps moving.

Whether we pay attention or not.

Whether we're ready or not.

Whether we spend it wisely or waste it without thinking.

As Jim and I talked, something beautiful happened.

The meaning of the dream wasn't something I gave him.

It was something he discovered for himself.

Those are my favorite moments as a dream interpreter.

Not because I have all the answers.

But because I get to watch someone uncover a truth that has quietly been waiting inside them all along.

I've thought about Jim's dream many times since that day.

Not because I wonder who changed the watch in the painting.

That question no longer seems important.

Instead, I find myself asking a different question.

What am I doing with the time I've been given today?

Like Jim, I have my own list of "somedays."

Books I'd like to write.

Places I'd like to visit.

Friends I've been meaning to call.

Conversations I don't want to postpone.

Dreams have a remarkable way of reminding us that life isn't measured only by birthdays or anniversaries.

It's measured by ordinary Tuesdays.

By phone calls we finally make.

By laughter shared over lunch.

By sunsets we stop long enough to admire.

By saying "yes" to an invitation instead of "maybe another time."

Jim's dream wasn't really about an antique watch.

It was about today.

And perhaps that's why it has stayed with me.

Every morning we wake up, life quietly places another day into our hands.

None of us knows how many remain.

But every one of us gets to decide what we'll do with the one we've just been given.

If Jim's dream leaves you with anything, I hope it's this.

Don't wait for the perfect time.

It doesn't exist.

Tell the people you love that you love them.

Take the trip you've been postponing.

Read the book that's been waiting on your nightstand.

Write the story that's been living in your heart.

Offer forgiveness.

Say the words.

Laugh a little longer.

Stay for dessert.

Life isn't asking us to count our days.

It's asking us to fill them with the moments that matter most.

Perhaps that's the greatest gift Jim's dream gave me.

Not an answer.

A reminder.

Time is life's greatest gift.

The way we choose to live it becomes our story.

Meet the Author



GAIL ROBIN RAES

Gail Robin Raes has written more than twenty-five books spanning inspirational fiction, dream memoirs, women's fiction, children's books, and humorous memoirs. Her stories celebrate family, kindness, laughter, and the extraordinary moments hidden within ordinary lives.



Gail believes every person has a story worth telling. Through her books, she invites readers to laugh, reflect, heal, and discover that hope often arrives when we least expect it. Whether inspired by a dream, a conversation, or an everyday moment, her stories remind us that even the smallest experiences can change a life, leaving readers inspired, encouraged, and ready to embrace the next chapter of their own story.



Stories have the power to heal, to inspire, and to remind us we're never alone.





Learn more about my books and events at
www.GailRaes.com



Let's connect!



Meet the Author

Hello, my friend...

I'm so glad you found your way here.

Whether this is the first book you've picked up by me or one of many, I'd like to personally thank you for spending a little of your time with my stories. As an author, there is no greater gift than knowing someone has chosen to share a few hours of their life with words that came from my heart.

People often ask me where I get my ideas.

Sometimes they begin with a dream.

Sometimes with a conversation.

Sometimes with a funny family story, an unexpected moment, or something so ordinary that most people would walk right past it without giving it another thought.

I've learned that the best stories are often hiding in plain sight.

Over the years I've been blessed to write more than twenty-five books, including inspirational fiction, dream memoirs, women's fiction, children's books, and humorous memoirs. Although each book is different, they all have something in common. They celebrate family, kindness, friendship, hope, laughter, and the remarkable people who quietly change our lives every day.

You might find yourself sharing a picnic in the vineyards of Napa Valley... listening to dreams that refuse to be forgotten... laughing through the adventures of Papa Dragon and his little dragons... discovering that an empty

chair isn't always as empty as it seems... or slipping on a pair of flip flops to celebrate friendship and life's simple joys.

Every book is an invitation to take a different journey.

One of the greatest compliments a reader has ever given me wasn't about beautiful writing or an exciting story. They simply said,

"Your books feel like sitting down with a friend over a cup of tea."

I smiled when I heard that because it perfectly describes the kind of author I hope to be.

I don't write to impress people.

I write to encourage them.

I write to make someone laugh after they've had a difficult day.

I write to remind readers that kindness still matters, that families aren't perfect, that friendships are worth celebrating, and that hope often arrives when we least expect it.

Most of all, I write because I believe every person has a story worth telling.

Perhaps that's why I love listening as much as I love writing. Every conversation has the potential to become a story. Every dream has the possibility of changing a life. Every person I meet teaches me something new about courage, love, forgiveness, laughter, or simply finding joy in ordinary moments.

As you turn the pages of my books, my hope is that you'll find a little of yourself somewhere within them.

Maybe you'll laugh.

Maybe you'll cry.

Maybe you'll remember someone you've loved.

Maybe you'll look at your own life just a little differently.

If that happens, then every hour spent writing was worth it.

Thank you for reading my books, for sharing them with family and friends, and for allowing me to be a small part of your journey.

I hope our paths cross again in another story very soon.

Until then...

Keep dreaming.

Keep believing.

And never forget that your own story is still being written.

With gratitude,

Gail Robin Raes

Books by Gail Robin Raes
"Every story begins in my imagination,
but the parts readers remember are written from my heart."

Picnics Series

Picnics in the Vineyard

Uncorked: *The Story Behind Picnics in the Vineyard*

Picnic with Friends Book Club

Dreamer Series

Dream On

Dream On and On

Flip Flops and Friends Series

The Mermaid Wore Flip Flops

The Mermaid of Flip Flop Cove

Just a Girl Who Loves Flip Flops

Flip flops, Friends and Fireworks

Confessions of a Flip Flop Girl

Dragon Tales Series

Dragon Tales: The Adventures of Papa Dragon

The Magical Adventures of Levi and Papa Dragon

ABCs with Papa Dragon

Dragons Need Manners

Papa Dragon's Fiery Fiesta

Papa Dragon's Trick-or-Treat Trouble

Dragon Tales – Holiday Magic with Papa Dragon

The Crazy Christmas Dragon

The Dragon Who Saved Christmas

Papa Dragon's Hot-Hot Holiday Fiesta

Papa Dragon's Spring Break Adventure
Papa Dragon's Sleepy Little Dragons
Rise of the Dragon: A Heavy Metal Legacy
The Dragonfly Who Roared
Papa Dragon and Buzzby the Dragonfly
Papa Dragon and the Birthday Wish Machine
Papa Dragon Rocks

Children's Series

Bye-Bye, Birdy
Honk, Zoom, Hooray-Levi Turns Two Today!
Laugh Your Face Off!
Frankie and Darby Make a Splash!
The Girl Who Loves Dragons
Ellabella and the Pink Dragon Dreams
The Sparkling Tales of Sparkle Twinkletoes
The Birthday Wish Machine
The Twins and the Birthday Wish Machine

Bruno Series

Bruno vs. Shrub and the HOA: My Life as an HOA Criminal
Love on Tap
More Material for Guido

Fiction

Just Desserts
The Last Supper
Will You Marry Me?
Confessions of a Clutter Bug
Not Another Book!
Nothing Fits-And That's a Good Thing!

Don't Blame Me, Blame Barbie!

The Empty Chair

Conversation Highway

Reading, Writing and Wrinkles

Nonfiction

The Writer Before Me

Learn more about Gail's books, upcoming releases, events,
and bonus content: www.GailRaes.com

About the Book

Time is life's greatest gift.

Live today... because "Someday" is never found on a calendar.

— Gail Robin Raes

WHAT IF THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION ISN'T WHAT TIME IT IS...

...but what you'll do with the time you've been given?

For nearly half a century, Jim has treasured his great-grandfather's antique Hamilton pocket watch. Resting quietly in a display cabinet, it has long been one of his most cherished family keepsakes—a tangible connection to the generations who came before him.

Then one ordinary day, he pauses to admire it once again.

That night, everything changes.

Inside a magnificent old house, Jim repeatedly passes by a portrait of his great-grandfather. Hanging from the man's vest is the very same pocket watch. But each time Jim walks past the painting, the hands have moved.

The watch is keeping time.

Impossible.

Unable to shake the dream or its haunting mystery, Jim returns to the dream interpreter in search of answers. Together they explore a question that reaches far beyond an old watch and an impossible dream.

Could the changing time be pointing to something far more important than the past?

As Jim slowly uncovers the meaning hidden within his dream, he begins to see his own life differently—not by counting the years behind him, but by embracing the moments still waiting to be lived.

The Timekeeper is an unforgettable story of family, heritage, hope, and second chances. It gently reminds us that life is not measured by the number of years we receive, but by what we choose to do with the time we still have.

*Time doesn't wait for someday.
It simply asks what you'll do today.
Every life-changing moment
begins today.
— Gail Robin Raes*

WHAT IF THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION
ISN'T WHAT TIME IT IS...

but what you'll do with the time you've been given?

When 84-year-old Jim inherits his great-grandfather's antique Hamilton pocket watch, he treasures it as a family keepsake—a tangible connection to generations who came before him.

Then one extraordinary dream changes everything.

Inside a magnificent old house, Jim repeatedly passes a portrait of his great-grandfather. Hanging from the man's vest is the very same pocket watch. But each time Jim walks past the painting, the hands have moved. The watch is keeping time.

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*Because someday
never appears
on a calendar.*



*Time is life's
greatest gift.
Every day is another
opportunity to live it well.*

